



S M A L L

G R O U P S

F O L L O W I N G J E S U S T O G E T H E R

Small Group Leader Handbook



Welcome to Small Group Leadership

Thank you for joining us in the work of discipleship and spiritual formation at Hillcrest Church by leading a small group. We have many different types of groups, and each does things a little differently. What we share in common is this: a commitment to **do life together, follow Jesus together and be on mission together** in our community and in the world through this ministry of Hillcrest Church.

As a small group leader at Hillcrest, we believe it is vital that you feel supported in your service to your members, that you have the resources you need to lead well, and that there is help available when questions and challenges arise. Included in this packet is some practical information to get you started, but please know that we are only a phone call or [email](#) away. We look forward to doing this work with you.

One thing we don't want you to forget: you are not alone. While you (and your co-leader, if you have one) might be on your own in facilitating your particular group, you are part of a team of over 80 leaders involved with small group ministries. Together, we help over 400 people grow in their love for God, in their mission in the world, and in their friendships at church. Thank you for joining us in creating a spiritual home for the people of Hillcrest.

Vision for Small Groups

Life Together - Following Jesus Together - On Mission Together

Our vision is that anyone who joins a Hillcrest small group will experience genuine Christian community, have a safe environment to pursue spiritual growth, and be challenged/supported to be part of God's mission in the world.

- We want people to think of their groups as 'their people'.
- We want people to practice following Jesus in real ways, guided by Scripture and prayer.
- We want people to feel like they are part of something bigger, supporting one another in God's kingdom work, seeing their education/vocation as part of God's kingdom work, and being inspired to find their place in God's mission.

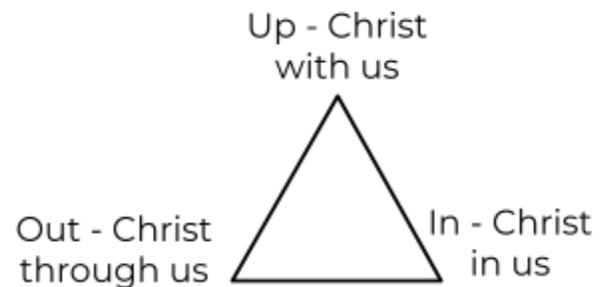


What's with the triangles?

You might be asking yourself why small groups are represented by three triangles? They are meant to evoke connection, the PNW mountains and evergreens, but most importantly our underlying philosophy of spiritual formation.

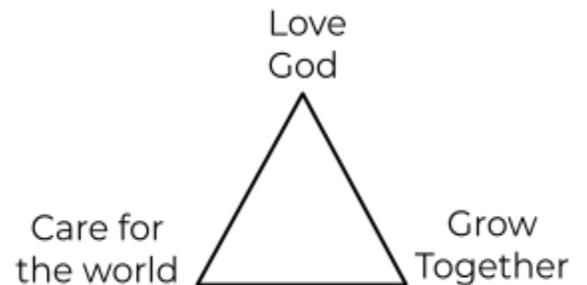
Spiritual Growth

We believe Christian spiritual growth involves 3 key directions, upwards, inwards, and outwards. Upwards is our relationship with Jesus. Inwards is Jesus transforming us and connecting us with his people. Outwards is expressing Jesus' mission in the world.¹ Healthy Christians have balanced triangles.



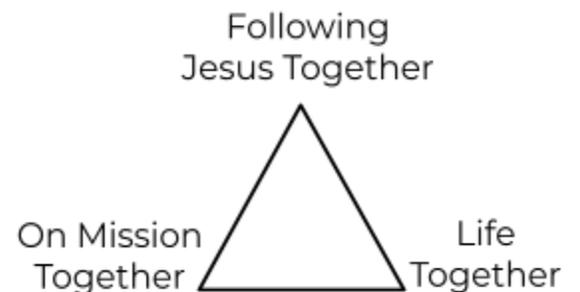
The Hillcrest Church Mission

We as a church capture this reality in the Hillcrest Church Mission Statement when we say Hillcrest Church exists to Love God, Grow Together, and Care for the world. Healthy churches have balanced triangles!



Hillcrest Small Groups

Finally, this gets lived out in small relational discipleship communities we call small groups. Healthy small groups have balanced triangles! A great question to reflect on with your group sometimes is "How is the shape of our triangle?"



¹ For more on this check out: *A Little Guide to Christian Spirituality* by Glen Scorgie



What do we hope Hillcrest Small Groups are known for?

Friendship: we have a place to belong. Small groups have fun, break bread, and enjoy life together.

Growth: we want to see people's lives transformed as their love for God and the world grows through their time in a small group.

Honesty: we can be ourselves. Small groups are a safe place to ask real questions and pray tough prayers.

Service: we are on mission. Small groups are a place to give and receive love and care. A family of people who care about the mission that God has set each of us on and seek to support one another in our Kingdom work.

Jesus: Jesus still disciples people! When we are together we hope Jesus is at the center of it, not just as an idea. We make space for Jesus and recognize His work in one another's lives.

Living the Kingdom: when Jesus' kingdom breaks into people's lives, it happens communally. He brings people together and shapes a certain kind of community, in the way people relate with one another and care for the wider world. We seek to live the kingdom together.

Expectations for Leaders

Small group leaders love God

Pursuing Jesus is the most helpful thing you can do for the members of your small group as a leader. We hope all our leaders are making intentional time to be with Jesus on a daily basis, and are also bringing their small groups before God in prayer.

Small group leaders love people

Building authentic relationships is part of leading a small group. We hope that each leader will practice authenticity and genuinely care about each person in their group.



Qualifications for all leaders at Hillcrest Church:

“All persons serving in a leadership position will be known for their view of Scripture as being the inspired, authoritative word of God, guiding both our personal actions as believers and our mission as a church. They will be known as men and women who are worthy to be followed in their devotion and obedience to Jesus, and in the positive quality of their servant leadership. Their life is to be a demonstration of mature, consistent integrity to their spouse (if married), to their family, to the community of Hillcrest Church and in their various relationships in the broader society as outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-8, Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:2-3.”

We desire that our small group leaders agree with and lead within the Hillcrest Statement of Belief. If you haven't read it before, you can find it at [hcbellingham.com>About>What We Believe](http://hcbellingham.com>About/What We Believe). If you have any questions about this, please don't hesitate to ask.

Practical expectations for small group leadership:

- Approximately 5 hours a week devoted to planning, praying for and participating in your small group
- Facilitate regular gatherings (yourself or share with others in your group)
- Prepare when you facilitate the group time together
- Provide pastoral care and communicate needs to pastoral staff when necessary
- Attend quarterly leadership gatherings
- Communicate about your group information with Hillcrest Church staff
 - Keep your Churchteams page up to date
 - Communicate with people interested in joining your group



Yearly Small Group Schedule

Fall

- Kickoff small group leader gathering
- September: churchwide invitation to join small groups and short term study groups
- Launch new small groups

Winter

- Mid-year small group leader gathering
- February: invitation to church community to join small groups and short term study groups
- Off ramp for people to change or try new groups

Spring

- End-of-year small group leader gathering
- Identify new leaders for fall
- Gather feedback and ideas from leaders and members

Summer

- Time off: many groups meet less often, or only socially, over the summer
- Identify new leaders and short term study groups for fall
- Off ramp for people to change or try new groups



Small Group Nuts and Bolts

When do people join small groups?

Every September and February we coordinate small group pushes: seasons when we are actively encouraging and inviting the people of Hillcrest Church to participate in small group ministries. We also allow people who are interested to join small groups throughout the year, should they express interest through community cards or other communication with the church.

How do people leave small groups?

We encourage groups to take a break or only meet once a month in the summer. Before this break, leaders can remind their group members that summer is a transition season for small groups. Members can make a decision over the summer if they would like to continue with the group, or join a new group in the fall.

How do people join small groups?

Most people join Hillcrest small groups in September and February, when we are publicly encouraging small group participation. We strongly encourage leaders to be looking for and inviting new people to join their group. This is the number one way that people find their way into small groups at Hillcrest: through a personal invitation from the leader or other members. People also find small groups through the fall catalog that highlights new and open groups, as well as filling out community cards or emailing smallgroups@hcbellingham.com.

What do groups study?

Hillcrest small groups gather to do many things: groups share meals, pray together, have fun and share life together, and also for growing in their understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. Groups follow Jesus together and study scripture utilizing a variety of resources:

- [Sermon Discussion Questions](#): the small group question team provides discussion questions that go along with the Sunday sermon scripture.
- [Leader resources](#): we have a page on our website full of resources for small group leaders. This will be continually updated throughout the year.
 - o Included on this page under "Hillcrest Curriculum Available" is a spreadsheet of all the bible studies we have available for checkout.
 - o We hope someday to have one sermon series a year that all small groups study together.



- We hope someday to create 5 – 7 small group studies, making up a core curriculum, for all small groups to do together.
- Groups also choose other great books and studies they'd like to do outside our resource library. **If there is a topic you are interested in, please ask, we'll help you find what you need!**
 - And if you do choose something on your own, please keep us in the loop on what you're studying. It's helpful and healthy for us to know what our different small groups are studying!

How do we measure and evaluate groups?

At the end of the year, we send a survey to all group members, as well as all leaders. The goal of these evaluations is to gather feedback on how the year went, to learn from one another, and to find out if small groups are helping people grow in community, grow in their understanding of what it means to follow Jesus, and grow in their mission to the world around them.



Churchteams

We use a database called Churchteams to keep track of people who are in small groups and to follow up with those who may not yet be committed or involved. It is not for attendance, but used to make sure that those who have shown interest are being followed up with. It is also a tool to facilitate online sign ups, and is used to communicate with small group leaders or anyone participating in a small group. See hcbellingham.com/small-group-leader-resources/ for videos explaining how to use Churchteams.

Accessing your group

Each small group leader will receive an email with a link specifically connected to their group. **Make sure to keep this link!** It will be your only way to access your Churchteams small group profile. If you lose your link, you can email smallgroups@hcbellingham.com to receive it again. **It is your responsibility to keep your profile up to date:** please check and update it quarterly when you receive a reminder. We don't take attendance at small groups, but having accurate rosters gives us an overall idea of participation in small groups at Hillcrest.

New Sign Ups

When someone new signs up online they put in their name and email to register. This is them saying they want to try out the group, it is not a commitment. They may do this for several groups. They will receive an automated email from Churchteams saying, "thank you, a leader will be in touch with you". The small group leader will also receive an automated email from Churchteams alerting them to a new member.

Within 48 hours of receiving the automated sign-up email with the new member's name information:

- Leaders should email the new member and BCC: smallgroups@hcbellingham.com (so Hillcrest knows that individual has connected with a leader). Let them know any relevant details about your group, invite them to your next meeting, plan a phone conversation, invite them to join your group through clear next steps.
- If they don't reply, DON'T GIVE UP. Ideas: try to message them again a few days later, see if Alex can give you a phone number to call, see if anyone in your group knows them and could reach out.



- Within 7 days of contacting them hopefully they will be able to connect with your small group. Also when we are meeting in person again, we strongly encourage you to try to set up a time just to say hi to them on a Sunday morning.
- Within 3 weeks, Alex will check in with both you and the new member, to see if the group will be a good fit.
- Within a month, please update Churchteams to reflect if that person has or has not joined your group.

Churchteams how-to: setting your maximum group size

*Edit -> Group Information -> * Maximum Size / Registration Limit*

- Change your maximum size to whatever number you would like.
- If the number of members in your group is less than your defined maximum size, then you will be automatically made available for online registration as an "Open" group.
- If the number of members in your group is more than your defined maximum size, then you will be automatically set as a "Closed" group - not available for online registration.

Churchteams how-to: adding a group member

Add (small blue box above member list) -> Click the current date -> Search for member name in database or click link to add new name

- Please keep your member list up to date. This is how we can check to make sure everyone that new signs up get followed up with.
- People will automatically get added to your group if they sign up via the website. It is important to remove a member if they are no longer attending your group.

Churchteams how-to: removing a group member

Check box of member you want to remove -> Action (above member list) -> Remove

- People will automatically get added to your group if they sign up via the website. It is important to remove a member if they are no longer attending your group.



Churchteams how-to: changing your group description

*Edit -> Group Information -> * Group Description*

- Whatever description you have here will be seen on the website.

Churchteams how-to: changing meeting address

Edit -> Group Information -> Meeting Address

- You don't need your full address here. Please put your nearby cross streets so people can know which area in Bellingham you meet.

Churchteams how-to: changing group photo

Edit -> Group Photo -> Upload

- Feel free to change your photo to whatever you feel would be a good representation of your group.



Resources

Support available to you

Please know that you are always welcome to connect with Tim and the Small Group Leadership Team for anything you need.

Additionally we have a Leader Care Team that will be praying for you and checking in with you occasionally simply to provide support throughout the year.

Discussion Questions

Every Sunday, a new set of [discussion questions](#) is uploaded onto the Hillcrest website. These questions follow the sermon from that morning and are available for you to use with your Small Group.

Other Online Resources

- [Small Group Leader Resources](#): includes a spreadsheet of available studies for check out from the church library
- [Hillcrest Theology and Values](#)
- Small Group Facebook page (contact [Alex Allyne](#) for an invitation)
- [Bible Project](#): groups have enjoyed using plans from this website for small group study

Groups with children

Below are some ways that groups with children have structured their meetings. If you are having trouble figuring out a childcare situation that works for your group, we would love to talk through ideas together.

- Hire a childcare worker for all the kids in your group
- Have men/women split meeting times
- Have children present during meeting times
- Have children in another room during meeting times